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RELIGIOUS MISCELLANY.

PROGRESS OF MORAL SENTIMENT.

For the Boston Recorder and Telegraph.

There is a declaration of the late Rev. John

Newton, which has often struck me as very

remarkable. "During the time I was engaged in

the slave-trade," he says, "I never had the least

scruple as to its lawfulness. I was upon the

whole satisfied with it, as the appointment of

Providence, far from eligible, I considered myself

as a sort of goaler or turnkey, and was sometimes

shocked with an employment that was perpetual-

ly conversant with chains, bolts, and shackles. In

this view I had often petitioned in my prayers,

that the Lord, in his own time, would be pleased

to fix me in a more humane calling."—See New-

ton's Works, Vol. I. p. 89, 97.

Mr. Newton had been employed in the slave-

trade eight or nine years. During the latter

half of this time he had been hopelessly a pious

man. The Lord would fix him in a more humane

calling. He had often prayed also, doubtless,

that the Lord would enable him to do to others,

as he would have others do to him. And yet,

while making this prayer, he could subject his

fellow beings to "chains, bolts and shackles,"

and tear them from all the endearments of home,

and convey them to distant countries, and sell

them into hopeless bondage! And what is more,

he could do all this, and not have "the least scruple

as to the lawfulness of his cruel employment!"

And when he left it, he left it, not because he

doubted its lawfulness, but from other causes.

Some will almost deny him the Christian char-

acter, while acting in a manner so inconsistent

with the principles of religion. Yet this would

be rash. During the latter part of the time, he

was a man, as there is good reason to believe,

of some genuine pious feelings. And there may

have been others in his day, possessing the like

character, engaged in the like employment, and

laboring under the like blindness as to the wrong

which they were committing.

Our wonder is excited in view of these facts.

Such has been the increase of light, and such

the progress of moral sentiment, that practices of

this kind could not be pursued at the present day

by those who have embraced the religion of the

gospel. Every man of enlightened piety, and

even of common humanity, looks upon them with

abhorrence.

But are there not some things practised at the

present day, upon which succeeding generations

would look back with something of the same sur-

prise, with which we look upon the slave-trade?

Will it not be the case, as light and moral

sentiment increase, that war will go into desuetude,

and be considered only as a practice of a dark

and barbarous period of the world? On this

subject no small change in public opinion is already

effected. This change, we may presume, will go

forward. The inhabitants of some future period

will look with perfect astonishment on the bloody

conflicts of preceding ages. When they learn

that Christian has been arrayed against Christian,

and that in some instances those who have been

hopefully the genuine disciples of the same Sa-

viour, have inured their hands in each other's

blood, they will be at a loss to find a solution

of such conduct. How the vain pretensions of

civil authority, and the false glare of military

power, should have made man needful war innocent,

and the murders connected with it a matter of

praise, and drawn into the ranks of the contending

parties the subjects of the Prince of peace,

they will be scarce able to understand.

In like manner, we may presume, duelling

will be viewed with increased abhorrence. And

especially will the friends of religion and good

order avoid the sin of promoting to office men

who are guilty of this practice. As there has

been a progress of moral sentiment respecting

slavery, and war; so there will be respecting

this petty private war. And doubtless there is

moral sentiment enough now on this subject, if

it could be brought into combined operation, to

far. But let the subject be examined, and see

what attention it ought to receive.

On the subject of theatres, a correspondent of

your paper lately made some remarks, involving

the same general principle with the sentiments

which I am now advancing. I doubt not that

the views of that writer will be realized.

[To be Continued.] A.

For the Boston Recorder and Telegraph.

DOCTRINAL TRACTS.

Messrs. Editors,—I was pleased with the

remarks of "brother Paul" in your paper of

April 12th, in the communication headed 'Pedo-

baptist Tracts.' I have for several years wished

that a doctrinal Tract Society might be formed,

which would publish and circulate without re-

straint, Tracts in vindication of those sentiments

which are of great importance, and which are by

other descriptions opposed. The doctrines of the

gospel are the foundation of all experimental and

practical religion, and were viewed all-important

by the reformers, our pious forefathers, and

other great lights in the church, who were

ever ready to "contend earnestly" for them, and

to make every sacrifice in their defence. The

eminently pious and great Mr. Edwards, speak-

ing of the prevalence of Arminian senti-

ments in this country in his day, says they are

"threatening the utter ruin of the credit of those

doctrines, which are the peculiar glory of the

gospel, and of the interests of vital piety." The

celebrated Whitfield calls the doctrine of elec-

tion a precious doctrine, and urges a strenuous

defence of it.

But in this day of charity and catholicism, many

seem disposed to give up the great doctrines

of the gospel, or at least not to defend them, or

to bring them much into view, lest it should interrupt

that harmony and union between different de-

nominations of Christians, which they appear to

consider the most desirable. They do not in-

deed as yet include Unitarians and Universal-

ists, or view them as evangelical Christians. But

then they view those as evangelized who re-

ject some of the peculiar doctrines of Calvinism,

and are cultivating a union with them. And to

prevent an interruption of this union, these doc-

trines must be kept out of sight, or mentioned

only incidentally. Some years since, several de-

nominations, in a western state, formed a union,

one article of which was, that they should not,

at their meetings, bring into view any doc-

trine wherein they differed. A very respecta-

ble clergyman, being called to preach before a

society, composed of different denominations,

observed that he "supposed the ground, on which

they met was in some respects neutral ground."

He therefore considered himself as precluded by

the occasion from bringing into view some doc-

trines, which he believed to be of vital impor-

tance, and which, in other circumstances, he

should have regarded it as a sacred duty to ex-

hibit.

And the Am. Education & National Tract Soci-

eties seem to be acting in some measure upon the

same principle, and wish to unite in them as

many denominations as possible, and not to discuss

or bring promiscuously to view those points, on

which they differ. Hence there seems to be

great need of a Doctrinal Tract Society. For

other denominations will not take this neutral

ground. The Baptists have a Tract Society,

which will not give up the privilege of publish-

ing Tracts in favor of their peculiar sentiments.

The Methodists have their Tract Society, de-

signed to propagate their sentiments and to op-

pose Calvinism. And let us not read No. 35

of their Tracts, and he will see with what war-

like Calvinistic doctrines are opposed. And shall

we be silent, or blame others for vindicating their

sentiments, if they think their agreeable scrip-

ture, or accuse them of sectarianism for doing it?

So long as any extreme of their own denomina-

tion is the pure in doctrine and practice, they must

desire that it should prevail; and have a right, in

all proper ways, to disseminate its doctrines.

And while we allow them this liberty, shall we

not vindicate our own sentiments and practice,

if we deem scriptural and highly important?

If we do not, what may we expect will be the

consequence? The human heart is naturally

opposed to the soul-bumbling doctrines of the

gospel, and is disposed to reject them. But if

they are clearly taught, and the understanding

is enlightened and convinced, the understanding

and conscience will be on the side of truth, and

oppose the corrupt bias of the heart. But if the

mind is left uninformed upon those doctrines,

what will prevent the prevalence of error? Let

therefore candid, but convincing doctrinal Tracts

be printed and generally circulated. PETER.

For the Boston Recorder and Telegraph.

SOCINIAN CONVERSIONS.

Messrs. Editors,—It is no uncommon thing

for persons at this day, in this commonwealth,

to assume different names in religion. Some who

were accounted orthodox turn socinians; and

others who have been considered socinians have

turned orthodox. It has occurred to me that

something of the spirit and character of the

two systems might be learned from the evidence

that is furnished of the change. Without going

into an examination of the tendency of the two

systems, I will mention merely a few things that

have fallen under my own observation. I have

been acquainted with a good many who have

turned socinians. In most of them, there was

very little turning, it is true. They were Uni-

versalists or avowed Deists before. In such

cases the change was only nominal, and took place

either to avoid the payment of taxes or to become

respectable. Such would evince no transforma-

tion, they pretend to none. There have been

some instances in which church members con-

nected with orthodox churches have "gone out

from them, because they were not of them." Now

we must judge of a system by its influence, &

what is the effect produced upon those converts?

Do they pray more? Are they more strict in

family religion? Do they become more benevo-

lent? Are they more meek, or spiritual or self-

denying? In every instance the reverse of all this

has been true. Humility as we understand it, is

scouted; they become more worldly minded—

more lax in their regard for the Sabbath, and in

most instances give up family religion, or read

some general and very indefinite prayer. While

they pretend to be liberal Christians, they are

now becoming actual persecutors of those mem-

bers of their families who adhere to the truth—

I could mention facts that would hardly have

a parallel out of the pale of the Catholic church.

The opposition to the truth they manifest in al-

most all cases is strongly marked. Their feel-

ings become so estranged from every thing con-

connected with orthodoxy, that, like the papists,

they appear to justify themselves in misrepresen-

tations. I do not honestly believe a decided so-

cinian can give an unbiased opinion on any sub-

ject, or of any person, connected with orthodoxy.

To what are such people converted? They seem

to have no strong attachment to any sentiment,

or system of truths. Their union appears rather

the result of opposition to evangelical religion.

The things I have mentioned are no speculation

—they are palpable, and every one can judge

for himself. I believe them to be true, all true;

and I appeal to every observer of men if they

are not so. Show me a locution convert, and

take the words of Paul, describing the renova-

tion effected by the power of the gospel, *old*

things have passed away, hold all things have

become new, and how would you judge? Do

any speak of conviction of sin, do any under their

preaching appear like the Philippian jailer? How

is it that they who have the Bible are so blind

to this? My own opinion is, they are profoundly

ignorant of it. I do not believe they read it

any more than I believe they pray. If they an-

swer here, how can you judge hearts? I would

ask them before God, it is not so? I am mor-

ally certain it is; and before I can be convinced

to the contrary, I must be in another world or I

must have another Bible.

In cases where persons have left the socinians

conscientiously, and have professed to have ex-

perienced the grace of God, how different. They

have been brought to see and to feel the plague

of their hearts—they have wept over sin and

humbled themselves before God. They have

prayed much and continue to pray—the Bible is

their companion—they feel the full force of what

was said by one in the gospel, *whereas I was once*

blind, I now see. They love the truth, and can

tell you what truth it is they love. They love

Christians, not merely because they have left

those whom they cannot acknowledge as such,

but because they see in them the image of Christ.

Their feeling towards those they have abandoned

is not that of enmity, but compassion. They

oppose their doctrine because they consider it

morally dangerous, a moral poison that will de-

stroy the soul; but they love their souls and

pray for them, and could make any exertions to

save them. I have never known a Christian

parent cast off a child because he turned socinian;

but I cannot say this of all socinians. I cannot

say, how I should feel if one of my children should

